

Escitalopram

(pronounced ess-sigh-tal-o-pram)

Why has escitalopram been prescribed?

Escitalopram is an antidepressant known as a selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitor or SSRI. These medications are prescribed to treat depression and other mood disorders such as anxiety and obsessive compulsive disorder.

What are the benefits of taking escitalopram?

Antidepressants are effective in reducing the severity of the symptoms of depression. They also shorten the time to recovery and prevent depression returning.

Are there any precautions with escitalopram?

Escitalopram is suitable for most people. As with all medicines, however, there are precautions. Your prescriber will usually check that it is safe to prescribe escitalopram, but let your prescriber know if any of the following apply to you, as extra care may be needed:

- a) if you have epilepsy, diabetes, a history of stomach ulcers or suffer from liver or kidney trouble or suffer from heart problems including irregular rhythm
- b) if you are taking any other medication, particularly the antibiotic linezolid, selegiline used in Parkinson's disease, drugs for schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression some anti-inflammatory drugs or drugs for migraine or anticoagulants such as warfarin. Also, tell your prescriber if you buy any medicine 'over the counter' from a pharmacy or supermarket. Please also tell your prescriber if you take any alternative or complementary medicine such as Chinese herbal medicines. St John's Wort should not be taken by patients prescribed escitalopram.
- c) if you are pregnant, breast feeding, or wish to become pregnant.

What is the usual dose of escitalopram?

The starting dose is usually 10mg a day. This may sometimes be increased after several weeks. The usual dose of escitalopram may be between 10mg and 20mg. It may take some time to get to the dose that is most suitable.

How should escitalopram be taken?

Escitalopram is usually taken once a day, usually in the morning. However, you and your prescriber may decide that it is better for you to take the medicine at another time.

What form does escitalopram come in?

Escitalopram is available as tablets and as a liquid. The tablets are available as 5mg, 10mg and 20mg. The liquid is available as 10mg per ml and 20mg per ml in a special dropper bottle.

What should be done if a dose is missed?

If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If you miss a whole day's dose – just carry on as normal with the next day's dose. If you miss more than a day's dose, speak to your prescriber.

What will happen when escitalopram is first taken?

Escitalopram, like many medicines, does not work straight away. For example, it may take several days or even weeks for some symptoms to improve. To begin with, some people find that escitalopram may help them feel more alert and less slowed down. Later, (usually in two to three weeks) other symptoms should begin to improve. Many people do not experience any side effects. However some people may experience side effects. We have listed potential side effects in the table below, whether or not they are likely to be short or long-term and what measures can be taken is also described. There are other possible side effects – we have listed only the most important ones. Ask your doctor, pharmacist or nurse if you are worried about anything else that you think might be a side effect. Further information on side effects is available in the official manufacturer's leaflet.

Reporting side effects

The 'Yellow Card' scheme encourages patients to report any side effects that they feel may be caused by their medication. Ask your doctor, pharmacist or nurse for the forms if you wish to report any side effects. Alternatively, telephone 0800 100 3352 or go to www.mhra.gov.uk.

Is escitalopram addictive?

Escitalopram is not addictive, but if you stop taking the medicine suddenly, you may experience unpleasant physical feelings. Symptoms are fairly common and include nausea, insomnia, electric shock sensations, anxiety, dizziness and vivid dreams. Reducing the dose of escitalopram slowly may make these symptoms less severe.

What about alcohol?

It is recommended that people taking escitalopram should not drink alcohol. This is because both antidepressants and alcohol can cause drowsiness. If the two are taken together, severe drowsiness can result. This can lead to falls and accidents. As well as this, drinking alcohol may make depression and anxiety worse. However, once people are used to taking medication, then *very small amounts* of alcohol may not be harmful. It pays to be very careful, because alcohol affects people in different ways, especially when they are taking medication. Never drink alcohol and drive. Discuss any concerns you may have with your doctor, pharmacist or nurse.

Is it OK to stop taking escitalopram when symptoms go away?

No. If you stop taking escitalopram, your original symptoms are very likely to return. Most people need to remain on escitalopram for at least six months after they have fully recovered. You should always discuss with your prescriber any plans you have to reduce or stop any of your prescribed medicines.

Are there any alternatives to escitalopram?

Yes, there are alternatives available. Although antidepressants have the same therapeutic effects they differ in the side effects they produce. There are more than 20 antidepressants available so most people can find one which suits them. Psychological therapies can also help in some types of depression, either as an alternative to medication or alongside it.

Summary of side effects

Side effect	Side effect
<p>Anxiety or restlessness - Common (feeling worried and agitated)</p> <p>What can be done about it? This should wear off within a few days. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.</p> 	<p>Nausea - Common</p> <p>What can be done about it? This should wear off within a few days. Taking the medication with food may help. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.</p> 
<p>Insomnia or disturbed sleep - Common</p> <p>What can be done about it? This should wear off within a few days. Escitalopram should be taken in the morning. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.</p> 	<p>Sexual dysfunction - Common Reduced libido (desire) and lack of orgasm in males and females. Impotence in males.</p> <p>What can be done about it? Any changes should be reported to your prescriber. It may be necessary to switch to another medication. Symptoms should go away when switched to another medication.</p> 
(Other less common) side effects	How common is it and what can be done about it?
Diarrhoea – loose stools	Uncommon This should wear off within a few days. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.
Loss of appetite	Uncommon This should wear off within a few days. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.
Drowsiness	Uncommon This should wear off within a few days. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists. Taking the medication at a different time may help.
Headache	Uncommon This should wear off within a few days. Paracetamol can be taken but discuss with your prescriber if this persists.
Dry mouth	Rare This should wear off within a few days. Sugar-free boiled sweets, chewing gum or eating citrus fruits may help. Discuss with the prescriber if this persists.
Rash	Rare Stop taking escitalopram. Contact your doctor, pharmacist or nurse for further advice.

Bleeding including stomach or intestinal bleeding	Rare Let your doctor know if you vomit blood or develop black or blood stained stools. You may need to switch to another antidepressant drug or start an additional drug called a proton pump inhibitor which help prevent ulcers developing.
Fast, irregular heart beat or fainting	Very rare These could be symptoms of a life-threatening condition known as torsade de pointes. Stop taking escitalopram and seek medical advice immediately if you experience these symptoms.

Very common = almost everyone affected

Rare = few people affected

Common = many people affected

Very rare = very few or no one affected

Uncommon = some people affected

Disclaimer

This leaflet is to help you understand more about your medication. This is not an official manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet (see <http://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/>). Remember, leaflets like this can only describe some of the effects of medication. You may also find other books or leaflets useful. If you have access to the internet you may find a lot of information there as well, but be careful, as internet based information is not always accurate. If in doubt consult your GP or a health care professional.

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